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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Ethiopia: The Unfinished Revolution

Introduction

Ethiopia's creeping revolution--now some 8 months old--has not yet unfolded to the point where we can speak with confidence about the nature of the successor regime or the policies that will eventually take shape. Thus far, a single leader has not taken stage center and dominated the revolution; factions within the military are still locked in struggle to capture command of the revolution that is largely being played out away from public view.

What follows is thus necessarily an interim assessment on where the country stands now and the direction it will take in the months to come. We have divided the subject, somewhat arbitrarily, into three parts: Part I discusses Ethiopia's internal political situation and where that appears to be headed. Part II tries briefly to place Ethiopia in its East African context. Part III is concerned with Ethiopia's international role and its relations with the US and that Soviet Union.

Conclusions

--Instability and governmental paralysis will continue for some time, and the moderates will be subject to conflicting pressures from extremists at both ends of the political spectrum. We believe that the moderates will stay reasonably united, however, and retain control of the Ethiopian revolution, at least in the short term. They will attempt to carry out political and economic change a step at a time guided by pragmatism rather than ideology.

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--- Radical military and civilian elements will continue to challenge the moderates' leadership. In order to avoid a complete break with the radicals, the moderates may have to make concessions on some issues, thereby pushing the revolution farther to the left.

--- The coordinating committee will probably abandon any pretense of maintaining the monarchy and declare a republic, headed by General Aman.

--- General Aman's influence may increase, but he is not likely to be able to establish a position independent of the coordinating committee or to become Ethiopia's strongman. In his exposed position, he could also be blamed for any of the revolution's serious mistakes or failures, and be removed from office.

--- One of the military's less well known figures may yet emerge as the revolution's acknowledged leader. This process could take many months, perhaps a year or more. One prospective candidate for such a role is Tessema Abaderash, an air force colonel. He is an ally of the moderates, part of Aman's entourage, and deputy commissioner of the drought relief commission. This latter position could provide him with the means of extending his power and influence.

--- Land reform will be the first major program carried out by the military.

--- Somalia will not try to seize the Ogaden unless there is an almost complete breakdown in order inside Ethiopia.

--- Ethiopia will give stronger emphasis to non-alignment while trying to maintain good relations with Western countries, especially close economic and military ties with the US. If the moderates become seriously dissatisfied with US military aid, they might carry out a more basic shift in foreign policy as a means of appeasing the radicals and bidding for major Soviet support.

Internal Politics

With the deposition last month of Haile Selassie the military emerged as the undisputed center of supreme political authority in Ethiopia. The ruling armed forces, however, are divided within their own ranks and are not yet able to provide coherent leadership.

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The political change set in motion by the military revolt is irreversible. The old order based on position, wealth, and family connections has been destroyed. The monarchy has been retained for the moment, but we believe the ruling Armed Forces Coordinating Committee--whatever its original intention--will probably opt soon for a republican form of government.

Beyond acquiring power and neutralizing the political establishment under the former emperor, the military has done little to reorder Ethiopia's social and economic fabric, despite its earlier promises. For the most part, the impact of the revolution so far has been confined to the top layer of the upper classes and to the cities. The bulk of the peasant population remains unaffected, although there have been numerous isolated instances of peasants taking matters into their own hands and attempting to seize lands from their landlords. The provincial elite--comprised of landlords, merchants, and grain dealers--remains entrenched in the countryside. The military has been too preoccupied with power struggles within its own ranks and with its conservative civilian opponents in the capital to plan or inaugurate a coherent program of change.

The military has, however, created expectation of further significant change, and has made numerous promises of specific new policies. At this time, the basic goals of the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee appear to be:

- Complete destruction of the feudal social order and an end to the local domination by the provincial elite. This is to be accomplished mainly by land reform and by the enactment of new laws altering the relationship between tenant and landlord.
- A reordering of economic priorities to give emphasis to improving the lot of the less affluent. The committee wants active government encouragement of economic development and plans a larger direct economic role for the government.
- A commitment to the establishment of constitutional government.
- Maintenance of Ethiopia's present boundaries, combined with the introduction of a measure of political decentralization for the country's diverse ethnic and regional groups. The new leaders clearly will not tolerate separatism, however.

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Members of the coordinating committee, while endorsing these broad goals, differ on the pace and method of change. A constant shifting of alliances, both within and between the units represented on the committee, complicates the task of defining the various factions. A basic division, however, has emerged between a majority group with essentially moderate objectives, which so far has commanded majority support within the committee, and a more radically-inclined minority group. Almost all the committee's major decisions have reflected the moderates' viewpoint; the radicals had their way only on the deposition of Haile Selassie in which they were aided by an accumulation of evidence of the ex-emperor's corruption.

The moderates favor a continuation of military rule until the country is better prepared for parliamentary democracy, a more representative legislative assembly is elected, and land reform is underway. At present, their reported goal is a return to civilian government within two or three years, but they could well decide to extend the period of military control. The moderates favor far-reaching changes, but they want to move cautiously and to gain broad civilian support without resorting to coercion.

The moderates, if they stay in charge, will probably stop short of establishing a thoroughly socialist economy. They appear prepared to allow private enterprise and foreign investment a significant role and to refrain from large-scale nationalization of businesses, except for those enterprises in which the royal family and other aristocrats have major interests.

Although the moderates are united generally on matters of public policy, there are tensions among them stemming from personal rivalries, ethnic and regional differences, and military unit loyalties. These animosities, even if they do not lead to an open split, will continue to drain much of the committee's energies and reduce its ability to direct effectively the country's affairs.

The radicals on the committee want an immediate return to civilian rule and the reshaping of Ethiopian society along socialist lines, together with abolition of the monarchy and harsh punishment of Haile Selassie and the imprisoned aristocrats. Advocates of Maoism, communism, "African Socialism," or the "Tanzanian model" can be found on the committee. At a minimum, the radicals--found mostly in the air force--want

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their civilian allies in the university and labor unions to have an important role in the government. Although unable so far to dominate the committee, the radicals are vocal and aggressive in pushing their demands, and they could cause considerable trouble. Their opinions therefore have to be taken into account.

Aman is the front man for the coordinating committee, which picked him to be titular leader of the provisional military government because he is personally magnetic and popular with the ranks. He has drawn large and enthusiastic crowds during travels throughout Ethiopia, but in private meetings with the cabinet and other officials he shows deference toward the coordinating committee representative who almost always accompanies him. There have been reports of antagonism between Aman and members of the committee; Aman no doubt chafes at times at taking orders from his juniors, but right now he does not seem to be engaged in an outright contest for power with the committee. In recent public statements Aman has strongly criticized those who attempt to create disunity--the same line taken by the committee.

If Aman did make a bid for power in the near future, he would probably lose out to the committee. Aman seems more likely to try to extend his influence by slow and careful moves than to mount an overt challenge. He is of a different ethnic and regional origin than most of the committee's members. Although these considerations are less important to the younger military than to other Ethiopians, they are still potent enough to limit Aman's chances of establishing his control of the committee.

The Separatist Threat

During the old regime, Haile Selassie was fairly successful in submerging regional and tribal differences, with the exception of the separatist movement in Eritrea. General Aman and the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee are acutely sensitive to the possibility that these differences could come to the fore in the present period of instability. The military government is thus seeking to defuse such trouble spots

In the case of the most pressing of these problems, Eritrea, the Ethiopian military and the separatist Eritrean

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Liberation Front seem headed toward negotiations, with the Sudanese government perhaps undertaking a role as intermediary.

Last month the military committee adopted a more accommodating position toward Eritrea and named new provincial officials to replace unpopular appointees of the old regime. The committee, of course, is unwilling to grant the province independence, and also seems unlikely to agree to a federation proposal made by some Front members. Negotiations, once begun, will almost certainly be prolonged. At present it seems likely that the ELF faction which is more prone to accept compromise will eventually join with traditional, non-ELF provincial leaders and reach some agreement with the government. The more radical ELF members will probably continue terrorist activities, but they will be more susceptible to army counter-pressure.

There is a possibility that other separatist movement will develop. The Tigre are second only to the Amhara tribe in Ethiopia's traditional hierarchy of ethnic groups. Ras Mengesha Seyoum, the Tigre leader, and one of Ethiopia's most powerful aristocrats, remains at large. The committee only last week issued an order for his arrest, accusing him of corruption and of trying to organize an insurrection.

The committee delayed taking action against Mengesha because it recognized that Mengesha had a better chance than the other noblemen of organizing armed resistance. Mengesha has been one of the more progressive members of the aristocracy, and as governor general of Tigre had made a conscious effort to improve living conditions for the local population. As a result, he was generally popular, and is believed to retain many loyal followers. His present whereabouts is unknown; there are some reports he has fled to Sudan. There are also reports that several thousand armed men have joined him. Although this number may be exaggerated, Mengesha could cause considerable problems for the military if he decided to lead a revolt.

The Galla tribe is another potential source of dissidence. The Galla are the largest single ethnic group in Ethiopia, but many of them are dispersed throughout the country. Separatist sentiment is felt most keenly among the large number of Galla concentrated in an area south of Addis Ababa. This group carried out an insurgency against the government from 1965-1970, and they might believe this is an advantageous time to renew their activities.

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Any separatist moves by the Tigre or Galla would probably first take the form of sporadic violence and isolated attacks on government installations. The unity of the armed forces will be a major factor in determining the success of such movements. If the military avoids irreconcilable splits in its own ranks, it will probably be able to prevent large-scale organized resistance. The inauguration of land reform would also reduce the chances of peasants joining a rebellion.

Concern about Somalia

The military government's major regional worry is that neighboring Somalia has a military edge and might try to grab the Ogaden region inhabited by ethnic Somalis. The long-standing fear of Somali irredentism was a major factor in Addis Ababa's recent request that the US increase military grants and credits to cover the purchase of arms in lieu of cash sales previously authorized.

Mogadiscio will be on the watch for signs that the preparedness of Ethiopian forces in the Ogaden had deteriorated to such an extent that Somalia could seize a sizable portion of territory in a quick action and hold it against an Ethiopian counter-attack and the ensuing international diplomatic pressures. We do not believe, however, that Somalia will move against the Ogaden area unless there is serious disorder in Ethiopia.

The Somalis have indicated they do not intend to take advantage of Ethiopia's preoccupation with internal affairs to interfere in the Ogaden. Thus far, Somali President Siad had adhered to this pledge. A breakdown in law and order in Ethiopia, however, would be likely to tempt the Somalis at least to support guerrilla activity across the Ethiopian border. The Somalis realize that an outright attack by their regular forces would probably unify the Ethiopians.

The coordinating committee may hope to reach an accommodation with Somalia, but at best the Somalis are only likely to agree to a mutual thinning out of military units in the area and stricter observance of a neutral zone along the border. The Ethiopians would probably view this as buying time. They might view their military requirements in less alarmist terms, but their search for more arms would continue.

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Foreign Relations

The Armed Forces Coordinating Committee has thus far been able to give relatively little attention to foreign relations, being preoccupied with ousting the old order and now engaged in infighting for control of the revolution. We surmise, however, that the military's use of the slogan "Ethiopia First" has implications for foreign policy as well as emphasizing the need for domestic reforms.

Just as there is conflict between moderate and radical military factions over the nature and pace of domestic reform, we think these differences spill over into the foreign policy field. As long as moderates are dominant on the coordinating committee, we expect that it--and the predominantly civilian cabinet fronting for it--are likely to follow these guidelines:

- Pursue better relations with sympathetic regional states, such as Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. We expect the Ethiopians to look to the Saudis and Iranians for arms and economic aid. The Ethiopians will be importuned by Libya to establish closer ties.
- Emphasize third-world solidarity more than did the old regime, and loosen political ties with the US as the new government tries to distance itself from the policies of Haile Selassie.
- Continue to look to the US as its major arms supplier, more for technical than ideological reasons. Should the US be deemed unresponsive to Ethiopia's military needs, the new Ethiopian rulers will look elsewhere.

We know that the Ethiopians have already made inquiries to the Soviet Union about aid. Moscow has indicated a willingness to provide Ethiopia with some military assistance, but Soviet officials have been very cautious. They have requested that detailed studies of Ethiopian needs be provided and said the Soviets would provide aid at levels "permitted by Soviet resources." Moscow's diffidence stems in part from its reluctance to offend Somalia and thereby jeopardize Soviet access to military facilities there.

The fact that the Soviets have not flatly turned down the Ethiopians suggests that Moscow thinks it can have it both ways in East Africa--as long as it does not give the Ethiopians too much.

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Addis Ababa is seeking more military aid because it believes Soviet arms deliveries to Somalia have given Mogadiscio the military edge. The Ethiopians are also trying to use their dialogue with Moscow to gain leverage in dealings with the US for military aid.

Most members of the ruling Armed Forces Coordinating Committee probably want to continue to rely mainly on the US for military aid; they probably see Soviet aid as supplemental. If the Ethiopians become dissatisfied with US military aid, they could seek closer military ties with communist countries. Some of the radicals within the military committee are already pressing for a turn in that direction.

Ethiopian military and civilian leaders are hopeful that Saudi Arabia and Iran--in addition to the US--will provide cash for arms purchases. King Faysal and the Shah, however, are reluctant to provide such aid while Ethiopia's domestic situation remains unstable. If the military should decide to take harsh action against Haile Selassie, they are likely to be even less responsive to Ethiopian requests.

If the moderates on the military committee are able to keep the upper-hand, Ethiopia will probably maintain reasonably friendly ties with the US and seek continued or increased US economic and military assistance. A takeover by the radicals would probably lead rapidly to a substantial decline in US influence in Addis Ababa.

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